
CONTEMPORARY SAUDI IDENTITY FROM RELIGIOUS IDENTITY TO NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a country that is beginning to play a leading role not only in regional but also international politics. It was in this country that the last two-day peace summit on the war in Ukraine was held. This new role is related to the huge changes that have been taking place in this country for several years, ruled by the young Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. The reforms introduced by this ruler are not only to significantly accelerate the country's economic development and increase its importance on the international arena, but they are also a kind of social engineering aimed at changing the Saudi identity based on religion (which, according to the ruler, inhibited any possibility of change) into an identity of which Islam is only one component. This article presents the current place of religion in the politics of Saudi Arabia and the changes that the new nationalism brought about the presence of Islam in the Saudi public sphere and the very identity of the Saudis. The aim of the work is to show the relationship between religion and politics that affect the identity of the citizens of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The article uses the method of critical analysis of sources, especially the latest reports and scientific reports. The work presents the place of religion in the politics of Saudi Arabia and the changes that the new nationalism has introduced in the existing presence of Islam in the Saudi public sphere and in the identity of the Saudis. The article deals with issues related to scientific disciplines, such as political science as well as religious and cultural studies.

Keywords: Wahhabism, Vision 2030, religious, national, identity

1. Introduction

The Middle East is a mosaic of various social and political groups, often engaged in bloody battles for leadership in the region. There is no doubt, however, that in the consciousness of many groups of Middle Eastern societies, the belief in the common heritage of the Muslim empire from the first centuries of the formation of Islam and the common cultural heritage are still present. Thus, attachment to tribal tradition and religiosity are considered the most

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important factors shaping the identity of Middle Eastern societies. These factors also have an intense impact on Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its inhabitants belong to the Middle East, due to the predominance of the Arab population, professing Sunni Islam, as well as the use of the Arabic language, cultivation of common traditions, culture and history.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932 and is the largest state in the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf. The ruler Abd al-Aziz ibn Su'ud began building a strong state based on Shari'a, he also established a regular army and created a state administration apparatus. The position of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the region and in the international arena has strengthened with the discovery of oil deposits. To this day, oil is the main element of Saudi politics and economy [1].

The total population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is almost 34 million 800 thousand people. Of this number, 90% are Arabs, 10% are Afro-Arabs. According to the 1992 Basic Law of Governance, the country's official religion is 93% Islam, Wahhabi Sunnism is dominant and the constitution is the Quran and Sunna. In addition, there are followers of Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism in Saudi Arabia [2]. These are mainly diplomats and their families as well as foreign employees. It should be emphasized, however, that publicly professing a religion other than Islam is punishable.

For many years, nationalist ideology was incompatible with the dominant religious identity of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This identity cemented the country's sense of unity while legitimizing the government through a narrative in which the clergy emphasized their allegiance to the ruler. In recent years, however, Saudi Arabia has embraced a new nationalism that is changing the country's domestic and foreign policies. The current situation has changed and it is the religious identity that has become incompatible with the vision of the state of the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. The discussion of nationalism is being used by the government to limit the influence of the religious establishment. For its actions, the authorities are also trying to ensure the support of young Saudis who oppose the religious atmosphere that has been dominant so far.

This article presents the place of religion in the politics of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the changes that the new nationalism introduced in the existing presence of Islam in the Saudi public sphere and in the identity of the Saudis.

Research on the special place of religion in the politics of Saudi Arabia is conducted in many directions of contemporary scientific discourse, because this country is an extremely important actor on the contemporary political scene of the world. At the same time, the kingdom of Saud is a specific state organism in which religion is the most important element of identity and a powerful political force. And this makes Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the centre of scientific reflection in various fields. The aim of this work is to show the inseparable relationships existing between religion and politics, which affect the identity of citizens, and the changes that are currently taking place in this matter in the country ruled by Mohammed bin Salman. In addition, the article will show how

the religious-political alliance was used to exercise power and will try to answer the question of what the contemporary national identity of the Saudis looks like and what place Islam occupies in its construction.

In this work, the method of critical analysis of sources was used. This method is used in many scientific fields, because it allows for a comprehensive analysis of the issues raised in the work. This method will enable the verification of reports existing in the literature and will demonstrate the need to prove and test unknown hypotheses. In addition, this method will also make it possible to demonstrate the purposefulness of the conducted analysis.

The power of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was built on the strong faith of Islam. On the other hand, the obedience of the citizens was achieved thanks to the inevitability of severe punishments, justified by the Qur'an. The doctrine of Wahhabism made it easier for the Saudi authorities to maintain rule in the country. The study analysed current scientific reports [3-5] and reports [6-8].

2. Analysis

2.1. Identity and culture

Identity is a broad concept, combining various aspects of both individuals and entire societies, as well as nations. Identity is the awareness of oneself, one's own characteristics and one's own distinctiveness. Moreover, it is also a set of features and personal data that make it possible to distinguish, recognize and identify individual people, and in relation to societies, it is the awareness of common features together with a sense of unity. The identity of societies includes religious, national, ethnic, racial, gender, generational and political aspects. They all shape and characterize a given society, and often also a nation. Each national identity is built on such foundations, affecting all members of a given community. It strengthens the group's sense of separateness from other nations. Clear signs of this separateness are the territorial borders of the state and national symbols: the flag and emblem, as well as the mother tongue. An important element is also broadly understood culture, which consists of factors such as the historical awareness of the nation's origin and cultural heritage. An extremely important part of personal and national identity are family traditions, connected with blood ties, and religion.

The second important factor shaping societies is national culture, which is a broad and complex system of ways of acting, norms, values, symbols, beliefs and knowledge, which is considered by a given society - nation as its own, grown from a specific tradition and historical experience, valid in its within. The most important parts of national culture are: language, religion and customs.

Undoubtedly, these elements are dominant in the national culture of Saudi Arabia. This does not mean, however, that the inhabitants of Saudi Arabia are a homogeneous society, identifying with one specific national identity, having one national culture. Saudi Arabia is the 14th country in the world in terms of area. However, it is not very populous, because there are less than 35 million

inhabitants, including 13 million foreigners [9]. At the same time, Saudi Arabia is a very diverse country in terms of ethnicity, which is a clear proof of the multiculturalism not only of the country, but also of the entire region. Identity pluralism is also present among its citizens. Saudis often define their identity as: Arab, Muslim, Saudi and Gulf (the term comes from the Persian Gulf region) [10]. In addition, it should be made clear that the Saudis are the only modern nation named after the rulers of the state. This unique situation has created a huge problem in distinguishing and drawing the line between the state as a social structure and the royal family, which is currently in power over the territory in question.

For the inhabitants of Saudi Arabia, religion is an extremely important element of their identity. Islam affects the lives of its followers in a special way, because it is not only a set of norms and spiritual values, a kind of anchor of the moral life of every human being, but it is also a code of law. Islam and the sharia built on its foundations determine the ways of conduct in everyday life.

2.2. *Wahhabism - religious identity*

The foundations of modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were laid in the mid-18th century by the founder of the first Saudi state, Mohammed Ibn Su'ud. He then united the Arab tribes inhabiting the Arabian Peninsula. At the same time, Islam was experiencing a resurgence. Philosophers and theologians postulated the need for religious reforms, because in their opinion Islam began to move away from the Qur'anic message. It was also the time of religious and reforming activities of Mohammed Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. Al-Wahhab, in his teaching, preached the need to return to the roots of Islam, claiming that his contemporary Muslims practiced Islam incorrectly. Among the main errors of religious practice according to Al-Wahhab was visiting the graves of the family of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. The reformer believed that this cult violated the unity of true Islam and was a form of polytheism, thus violating the oneness of God. These postulates became the foundation of a radical religious movement called Wahhabism. It should also be noted that the intensely growing popularity of the radical Wahhabism movement was associated with a sense of threat to the Muslim society, resulting from the then beginning expansion of Western powers into the Arab-Muslim lands. The faithful of Allah have tried to discover the strength of Islam in order to better protect their religious and cultural heritage. Wahhabism grew out of the Hanbali school, one of the four schools of law in Sunni Islam, being the most rigorous because it negates the legal value of any writings later than the Qur'an and the Tradition of Muhammad. In addition, it significantly limits the human function in the interpretation of religion. According to this teaching, history along with the progress of civilization should adapt to the Qur'an [11].

Thus, Wahhabism was constructed on the postulates of fundamentalism, taking an extreme form. The current of religious ideology preached a return to the sources of the original form of Islam, along with its simplicity and austerity

of customs. The foundations of Wahhabism are the Qur'an and the Sunna, as expressed in hadith. However, Wahhabis recognize only those hadiths, the truth of which they have no doubts [12]. Both sources of Muslim tradition are interpreted literally. A characteristic feature of Wahhabism is the fight against all elements present in Islam, and not belonging to its oldest, original version, the religion preached personally by Muhammad. For this reason, Wahhabism combats Sufism, and therefore Muslim mysticism, and condemns the cult of saints, including the veneration of graves. A believing Muslim who professes God's tawhid cannot use amulets and talismans, and therefore cannot refer to magic, astrology and witchcraft. Socially, however, a Wahhabi does not consume alcohol or use drugs. At the beginning of Wahhabism, coffee and smoking were also forbidden. Finally, it is forbidden to support and shelter heretics, as well as to form friendships with non-believers [13].

For Wahhabis, the only holy places in Islam are Mecca and Medina. State law was based on the principles of the Qur'an. The ruler, whose superior features are justice and gentleness, wields full power over the society that absolutely obeys him.

The message of Wahhabism was accepted by Mohammad Ibn Su'ud, which resulted in the conclusion of an alliance in 1744 between the founder of the state and the religious leader Mohammed Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. This agreement clearly divided influence: the political sphere was placed in the hands of the ruler Mohammad Ibn Su'ud, while religious matters remained in the hands of Al-Wahhab. The result of this alliance was the formation of a superior identity rooted in religion, i.e. Islam, which identity also served to legitimize the ruling family. Thus, Islam became the identity of the population, further strengthened by the importance of Saudi Arabia as the birthplace of this religion and the host of its two holiest places, Mecca and Medina [14].

The long-cherished belief in the exceptional importance of the Saudis in the Muslim world has significantly contributed to the strengthening of Islamic identity, supported by the pursuit of Arab unity. Undoubtedly, the political and religious alliance contributed to the creation of the Saudi state in 1932, with Wahhabism as the binding and, above all, the only interpretation of the Muslim faith [1]. The king of the new state was a descendant of Muhammad ibn Su'ud - Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd ar-Rahman ibn Faysal Al-Su'ud, called Ibn Su'ud.

The power of the kingdom strengthened with the discovery of oil deposits in 1938. Abd al-Aziz bound his country with a military and economic alliance with the United States of America, agreeing to situate military bases in the Persian Gulf and granting concessions for oil extraction to the Americans. The improvement of the country's economic situation was also felt by the society. The king introduced modernization in the state and also took up the fight against crime, thus guaranteeing the safety of pilgrims heading to Mecca and Medina. The king's sons have the privilege of bearing the surname ibn Abd al-Aziz Al-Su'ud. The strong relationship of political alliance with radical religious views continues. Wahhabism became the foundation of the existence of the Saudi state,

which in a short time became the economic power of the region, as well as an important partner on the international level [15].

2.3. Religion and politics

The policy of the authorities conducted in this way made the Saudis get used to the existing legal order along with its division: successive rulers became the personification of the state, which is responsible for the internal and international politics of Saudi Arabia, and the Muslim clergy takes care of culture, takes care of society and religion. Such an approach to politics and religion was an interesting procedure, because the state had a kind of protection for its actions and could show that the religious establishment limits the state authorities from introducing reforms. Of course, the smooth maintenance of the alliance between religion and politics required the establishment of certain privileges for society. The Saudi Arabian authorities did not impose a personal income tax on citizens. In addition, the state administration subsidizes water and energy for its citizens. Such measures have made the Saudis loyal to the state, and they do not aspire to political representation [6].

The popularity of Wahhabism among the Saudi community was also strengthened by the presence of the trend in everyday life. He condemned the lavish lifestyle of the population, as well as usury and wealth, while promoting brotherhood and equality of all Arabs. Such demands helped to gain recognition and support from the lower social strata, over time becoming an element of the identity of the Saudis. It should also be mentioned that Wahhabism distanced itself from all innovations, which was a clear opposition to Turkish and Persian aspirations. The conservative attitude justified the Saudi expansionist aspirations [7].

The radical Wahhabi law has introduced numerous restrictions on the everyday life of the inhabitants of Saudi Arabia. In the initial phase of the political-religious alliance, the functions of women in society were significantly marginalized, their ability to move freely and travel without appropriate legal guardians was limited, and women had limited access to education and holding important social and political positions [3]. The strong position of Wahhabism, becoming the binding ideology in the kingdom, covered more and more areas of life. Religious freedom was limited, which concerned not only the presence of other religions besides Islam, but also the prohibition extended to all other non-Wahhabi sects of Islam. The stable political position of the Saud family is also the strong position of the Wahhabis, and this means that there is no political pluralism in the kingdom. The durability of the political-religious alliance is only possible thanks to strict law. Therefore, in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia there is a specific, very drastic system of penalties, including decapitation for murder, amputation of fingers or hands for theft, public flogging, and in special cases, the courts adjudicate penalties in accordance with the 'eye for an eye' principle. An eye was removed from a man who poured acid on another man, as a result of which the victim lost his eye [16]. In addition, a verdict was carried out to

interrupt the spinal cord of a man who hit a pedestrian while driving a car, and the latter suffered a spinal injury and was paralyzed. Humanitarian organizations estimate that more than 100 such punishments are carried out in Saudi Arabia each year. The maintenance of strict rule by the Saudis is also possible thanks to the current ban on granting citizenship to people who do not belong to the Muslim community.

In conclusion, religion shaped the overarching identity of the Saudis, which also served to legitimize the ruling family. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a special significance in the history of Islam because this religion was born in these lands and host to its two holiest sites. It is therefore not surprising that Islam is the identity of the Saudi people. It is significant that religious authority was perceived as a buffer for political power, because it was responsible for introducing restrictions in the state. Over time, the Saudis got used to the fact that the state is responsible for politics, and the religious authority takes care of culture, society and religion. Such a division of responsibility was a protection of the state against social rebellions, because state authorities could always point to a religion that prohibited or withheld reforms. However, the increase in the diversity of views among the Saudi population in recent decades has made it increasingly difficult to maintain this position. Saudi Arabia's leaders must strike a balance between conservative and liberal calls for social reform. The most radical steps in this regard were taken by the current ruler of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman.

2.4. The era of Mohammed bin Salman

In 2015, Mohammed bin Salman became the vice-heir to the throne of Saudi Arabia, and two years later he became the official successor to King Salman and de facto took power in the state. In April 2016, support for him reached a peak when he presented his fundamental strategy, Vision 2030, which aims to increase economic, social and cultural diversification in the state. One of the main pillars of this vision has become the creation of a narrative defined by a nationalist rather than a religious image of the nation. To achieve this, the Saudi Arabian authorities undertook radical reforms.

First of all, the nationalist narrative represents a break with the past and the emergence of a 'new Saudi Arabia' that is to focus solely on the House of Saud as a continuation of the work begun 30 years ago by King Salman. In this new perspective, the royal dynasty distances itself from the protective figure of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. This is evident not only in the Diriyah museum, where apart from the manuscript that ibn Abd al-Wahhab wrote, it does not appear anywhere else. His silhouette can only be seen in the shadows, next to that of Emir Mohammad Ibn Saud in a video in the city's museum [8].

First of all, from 2022, Saudi Arabia gained a new holiday, 'Founders' Day', which commemorates the beginning of the reign of Mohammad Ibn Saud and the beginning of the first Saudi state. In a decree signed on February 22, 2022, Mohammed bin Salman moved away Wahhabism to a secondary place in

the history of the kingdom. The ruler placed the establishment of the state 17 years earlier, in 1727, i.e. the year of Emir Diriya's accession to the throne, and 'invited' the Saudi nation to celebrate 'Foundation Day' on February 22. Shifting the origins of the state undoubtedly means an attempt to distance the political and social origins of Saudi Arabia from the ultra-conservative religion. Interestingly, this new national holiday is only the second secular holiday in the history of the Kingdom. It is intended to familiarize citizens with the evolving history and character of the Saudi regime itself - from its roots in ancient Arab culture to modern monarchs [4].

It is clear that Mohammed bin Salman is trying to reorient national identity away from focusing solely on religion and towards a new idea of what it means to be 'Saudi'. Mohammed bin Salman wants to make Saudi nationalism the main legitimizing and unifying force in the country. While religion remains a key tool for governing the state in Riyadh, Islam is being redirected to support this new nationalist enterprise. This is most evident in the various reforms carried out under the Crown Prince, including attempts to distance Saudi Arabia's official history from Wahhabism; allowing women to drive, live alone and travel without a male chaperone; limiting the powers of the religious police; allowing public entertainment venues such as cinemas and concerts; purges of government officials and members of the royal family under the pretext of fighting corruption; and the arrest of clerics and religious scholars whom the regime has labelled as extremists [5].

Since 2017, the young heir to the throne has been increasingly vocal in public about the Kingdom's opposition to Islamism. "Seventy percent of the population of Saudi Arabia is under the age of 30, and frankly, we will not spend the next 30 years of our lives dealing with destructive ideas." [17] According to him, the implementation of the assumptions of Vision 2030 needs an enlightened, liberal and social atmosphere, far from radicalization, therefore, as he clearly stated in one of his interviews: "we cannot move forward, we cannot attract capital, we cannot have tourism, we cannot develop from such extremist thinking in Saudi Arabia" [18].

Fighting Islamism allows Mohammed bin Salman to remove critics of the new reforms. In 2017, an updated anti-terrorism law entered into force; its effect was to stop public criticism of the new changes in the country. This created an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety, thus helping to create a place in the public sphere for nationalist discourse. Anyone who criticizes or deviates from the Crown Prince's guidelines on matters of domestic or foreign policy becomes a traitor to the nation, as evidenced by the arrests of dozens of peace activists, intellectuals and clerics in September 2017 and June 2018. These actions gradually led more and more scholars to use the phrase 'moderate Islam' to promote social reform without explaining the attributes of this new version of the religion [19].

Another initiative that side-lines Wahhabism is the emphasis on pre-Islamic heritage in Saudi Arabia's history. Saudi nationalism uses the kingdom's pre-Islamic history in the service of political solidarity. Once neglected by the

authorities, the ancient remains and any tangible evidence of this history are being intensively studied and restored across the Kingdom by the newly formed Royal Heritage Commission. Six man-made monuments - five of them pre-Islamic - have been declared the country's first UNESCO World Heritage Sites and are open to the public free of charge.

The flagship investment in this area is 'Al-'Ula Vision'. The government has invested \$15 billion in publicity and development of the ancient spice trail oasis and stone city, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors. The authorities also used this place to organize Saudi Arabia's reconciliation with Qatar in 2021. Al-'Ula was also the setting for the first ever movie to be shot and produced in Saudi Arabia. The choice of pagan monuments as a new symbol for Saudi Arabia, a country that has long portrayed itself as the guardian of Islam, embodies the Kingdom's efforts to reimagine its pre-Islamic history within a nationalist framework. Today's Saudis are encouraged to recognize their role in a living national history that stretches from early Arabian history - very importantly, pre-Islamic culture - to the modern Saudi state ruled by the Al Su'ud dynasty [20].

The main vehicle for disseminating the revision of Saudi Arabia's history is the state education system. The new textbooks introduced in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia paint a positive picture of the pre-Islamic era in the territory of Saudi Arabia with a smooth continuation of the Islamic and modern eras. This is in contrast to the old books, which negatively portrayed the Jahiliyah period and limited the history of Saudi Arabia to the advent of Wahhabism [21]. As former Egyptian Minister of Antiquities Zahi Hawass, an archaeologist who is an expert on Pharaonic Egypt, put it: "The view of the Saudi citizen who saw these antiquities as mere idols and paid no attention to them is changing and now considers them part of his own history" [22].

The main efforts to change thinking about one's own identity are aimed primarily at young citizens of Saudi Arabia. According to the Saudi Statistical Office, 65% of the country's population is under the age of 40 and 46.7% is under the age of 25. In realizing its vision, Mohammed bin Salman makes sure to constantly emphasize the importance of young people, identifying them as true agents of change. The heir to the throne aspires to create a nation out of today's youth that will not obey the traditional royal family as an institution derived from tribal tradition and referring only to Wahhabism, but will be loyal to the nation state, the king and his successor [23].

Mohammed bin Salman does not oppose the Wahhabi religion and clergy as a component of Saudi identity, but it does challenge the religious establishment's monopolistic control over society. The Crown Prince himself seeks to control and monopolize society through his inner circle. The rapid development of culture, sports, entertainment, while releasing the religious police from their responsibility to regulate public social control, has greatly strengthened Mohammed bin Salman's position among Saudi youth. New institutions (a royal commission, a new ministry of culture) have been established to deal with the regulation of culture and national heritage, as well as

institutions responsible for sports and entertainment. They are headed by close friends of the prince who, it is worth emphasizing, are his peers. This top-down approach aims to support the cultural identity of young people, taking into account their attachment mainly to communication via social media. As a result, the new media became a viable arena for a new nationalist approach. Similar to the traditional bay'a (oath of allegiance) through which citizens affirm their loyalty to the new king, Twitter is now a forum for demonstrating nationalism, for example by increasingly using the Saudi flag next to images of the heir to the throne [24].

It wasn't just social media that felt the power of the new nationalism. In recent years, the traditional media has also been 'reformed' and now reflects the narrative of the new media, whose main task is to celebrate the country's national history. The launch of new TV channels in 2018 was aimed primarily at young people. As part of the implementation of 'Vision 2030', a new SBC channel was created, which was designed to "attract young viewers and show a modern image of the country beyond the borders of the kingdom" [25]. SBC was developed as a flagship entertainment channel that was added to the religious channel, education channel and news channel Al-Ekhabariyya affiliated under the Saudi Broadcasting Corporation [26].

The abolition of the existing conservative rules, the possibility of both sexes attending mass events, dating in public places are other elements that are to finally convince young people to the ongoing changes.

The shift in Islam's place in the Saudi public sphere became most evident during this year's Ramadan. In March 2023, the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs announced new rules for that month. These include a ban on donations to mosques and a ban on eating iftar meals in mosques after sunset. (Iftar is a ceremonial dinner eaten by Muslims during Ramadan.) In addition, prayers should be short, children are not allowed to pray in mosques, and believers must carry identity documents. With the exception of the major mosques in Mecca and Medina, the volume of prayers must be kept low and prayers must not be broadcast by the media. According to the new rules, temporary rooms or tents for iftar should not be set up. According to many analysts, these changes are a step towards a new Saudi identity that no longer treats Islam as the main pillar, and even pushes Islam out of public life [27].

3. Conclusions

The reforms being carried out in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia seem to reflect Mohammed bin Salman's determination to create what it called "a country of moderate Islam that is open to all religions, traditions and peoples worldwide" [18]. Undoubtedly, however, the disempowerment of the clergy and the religious police to create space for this moderate Islam creates a vacuum in the traditional Saudi identity, which has been closely tied to strict Islam from the very beginning. To address this problem, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has launched a public education project aimed at strengthening a strong national

identity - one that is not divorced from religion but is nevertheless separate from it, so that Islamic identity is still visible but is no longer the only reference. Now the nation is associated with a thousand years of history, and not just the cradle of Islam. The reforms please the young part of the Saudi society, people who are better and better educated, and above all often travel around the world, who know perfectly well what changes are taking place in countries with a clear separation of religion and politics. These changes are difficult to accept by elders and people associated with state or religious authority. There is always reluctance to lose some influence. It is known, however, that changes are necessary and Mohammed bin Salman knows it perfectly well.

These liberal social reforms are gaining increasing support from the Saudis themselves. A 2021 poll by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy shows that 39% [28] of Saudi Arabian citizens favour a moderate interpretation of Islam, up from 27% in 2017. In 2022, this percentage has already increased to 42% [29], which means that if this trend continues, by 2030 the majority of Saudis will be in favour of a more liberal lifestyle. How it will be, time will tell.

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